

## Garrett Park Historic Preservation Committee Report on Building sidewalks in the Garrett Park Historic District

This is a report by the Historic Preservation Committee on the proposal to build new sidewalks and rebuild old sidewalks in Garrett Park as a result of being awarded a grant from the Safe Routes to School Program (SRTS). We have earlier provided comments on the 15% completion report on the SRTS project. This paper will repeat and expand on issues that we raised earlier and will deal with the larger question of whether sidewalks are in keeping with the character of the historic district.

The Committee met twice to consider the SRTS plan, on November 15 and November 29. Members in attendance were Perry Chapman, Marian Green, Stephen Paczkowski, and Nancy Schwartz. Member Kevin Pope was out of the country. The meetings were public and well-attended by both citizens and public officials. Letters received by the Committee at those meetings are attached, as are e-mails directed to the Committee on the neighborhood listserv.

First the Committee sought to look at the history of sidewalk building in Garrett Park. Please see the attached document "History of Sidewalks in Garrett Park" for a more detailed history. From our research, we can draw the following conclusions:

1) Metropolitan Building and Investment Company (MIBC), the original planners of Garrett Park, did not reject the idea of sidewalks. In fact, it seems that they anticipated that sidewalks might eventually be built. Sidewalks are shown in sketches in the earliest sale brochure of 1887 and mentioned in the 1890 brochure. Two boardwalks were built along Keswick and Pembroke Streets, on the south side of Town. After becoming dilapidated, they were removed in 1902.

2) Of far more importance to MIBC were the beauty of the Town site and the layout of the streets. Early literature extols the park-like virtues of the site on the high land overlooking Rock Creek. The town was laid out with streets that curved to fit the topography. It is the survival of this 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic town plan that distinguishes Garrett Park and was one of the principal reasons for its nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

3) Even if sidewalks might have been part of the larger vision of Garrett Park, like the proposed electricity, water and sewer systems, they were never built. Few people in Town even kept horses, so there was no danger on the streets. Plus Garrett Park prided itself in its Macadamized streets with stone gutters which remained dry in all weather. So sidewalks were not a necessity for the Town and Garrett Park grew up without them.

4) Trees are an important element of the streetscape character in Garrett Park. Where there was not naturally-occurring woods, the town-owned parking was planted, by the early 1890's, with trees that would grow up and shade the streets. Since 1977, Garrett Park has been an arboretum with planting on town right-of-way overseen by the Arboretum Committee. Because the Town parking has been planted with trees from the Town's earliest days, it is very difficult to insert sidewalks into the parking on many streets. The parking has also been landscaped and maintained by private owners over the years and, although the land does not belong to them, the private landscaping adds to the park-like quality of the Town.

It is the Committee's conclusion, therefore, that the addition of sidewalks will change the historic character of Garrett Park as it has developed over nearly 130 years. The character of the Town today—as it has been throughout its history-- is that of lawns coming right to the edge of the streets. The Town

parking—the transition between private lawns and the street-- is planted with a wide variety of mature trees and shrubs. Street trees have been a part of the Town's appearance from the very beginning. Protecting and maintaining these trees makes placement of sidewalks within the historic district very difficult.

The Committee notes that the project proposes not only sidewalks, but concrete curbs and gutters and new driveway aprons. These are perhaps even more destructive to the character of the Town streets than the sidewalks. The Town has for many years had asphalted roads and rolled asphalt curbs. These contribute to the "country lane" appearance of the roads. The curbs grass over and blend into the adjoining yards, and they create edges for the roads that are anything but crisp and defined. Nothing says post WWII like concrete curbs and gutters. They are hard, straight and defining. Concrete is not a material that was historically used in Garrett Park, except for a few streets that were cut and paved in the 1950s. The introduction of concrete curbs and gutters will very much change the appearance of the Town.

But the Town does have some sidewalks. They run along parts of Kenilworth, Waverly, Strathmore and Clermont Avenues. The Waverly sidewalk may date from as early as the 30's, but most of the sidewalk sections were built in the 50' and 60's when the Town had experienced a growth spurt and there were many more cars and young children in Town. The safety of children was always a reason given by those in favor of constructing sidewalks. So it is also in keeping with Town history to add sidewalks when safety is deemed to be an issue. Even though it will alter the historic character of the Town, the majority of the citizens may feel that additional sidewalks are necessary for safety, especially that of children.

If it is believed there is a safety issue, the Town should do traffic studies that will define the nature of the problem and should look for alternatives that do not involve construction or will minimize the extent of construction. The Town has chosen to accept the premise that sidewalks are always safer, and has, therefore, not looked carefully at alternatives that might mitigate risk to pedestrians.

If the Town should decide that sidewalks are needed, they should be designed in such a way that they detract as little as possible from the Town character.

1. Sidewalks should be as **narrow** as possible.
2. When going around trees or other obstacles they should not jog abruptly, but be **curving** like the roads
3. The sidewalks should be constructed of material that looks as **natural** as possible. Consider dark tinted concrete, aggregate, or other material that does not stand out like light colored concrete. Could the sidewalk be a path of natural material?
4. Concrete curbs and gutters impart a sharp delineation to the street that is more characteristic of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century suburbs. **Consider not using concrete curbs and gutters.** They would detract as much, if not more, than sidewalks.
5. Leave driveway aprons and materials as **varied** as they now are
6. Soften new sidewalks with **appropriate plantings** to replace ones that were removed to build the walks or complement the landscaping in private yards.
7. Impact mature **trees** and shrubs as little as possible.

Approved by the Committee  
January 11, 2015